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CHILD SURVIVAL AND AFRICA'S FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

1. "There is need to re-align development priorities in order to emphasize the development of human resources not only as the object of development but also as the custodian and mentor of socio-economic development; as services of all the development as well as of the terminal products and services of all the development efforts. The human resource development sector in Africa requires positive action, if it is to play its proper role in ensuring the continent's survival and progress."[1]

2. Thus, having examined human resource issues since the 1980s, African Heads of State and Government meeting in Lagos, Nigeria, in extraordinary session, laid emphasis on the importance of man to Africa's survival and progress.

3. But, since then, the continent's situation has deteriorated tremendously as a result of natural disasters, drought, migratory locusts, desertification as well as the world economic recession, the slump in prices of African primary products and the unsustainable debt increase, coupled with restrictions introduced by structural adjustment programmes. The end result of all these is the impoverishment of the most underprivileged social group and, above all, the worsening of the plight of women and children who are most affected by the reduction in the budgets for health, education, employment, ... etc.

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[1] OAU Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000. Chap. IV, page 41, para. 95.

4. African children who are the first victims of armed conflicts, tension, violence, economic problems and natural disasters, are living under very appalling conditions. Consequently,UNICEF which, since its inception, has helped during many disasters, has had to draw the attention of world leaders, decision-makers, religious leaders, artists, intellectuals and other communities, to the danger looming over this continent if it continued to abandon its youngest citizens.

The 1980s

5. These years were declared a lost decade for Africa which recorded the lowest growth rates in all areas.

6. Certainly, after independence, African States had implemented dynamic economic and social development programmes. Thus, we witnessed a substantial increase in the literacy, education and health coverage rates: life expectancy increased from 41 to about 45 years while the infant mortality rate of children under one year, dropped from 286 in 1960 to 184 in 1984 and that of children under five years, fell from 332 to 191 during the same period.

7. Generally speaking, and taking one year with another, Africa recorded encouraging results. But then the facts are telling: during the 1980s, average income fell considerably, funds earmarked for education and health dropped and, in certain cases, by 50 percent, thereby leading to a drop in school attendance rates and the means to combat natural and infant diseases

8. According to UNICEF, most of the 400,000 deaths recorded in Africa in the 1980s, could be attributed to a slow-down or a decline in the development process which was itself due to an unprecedented rise in debts, increased interest rates, a slump in the price of basic commodities, inadequate investment of loans contracted and the national and international management of the resulting debt crisis. Unfortunately, the figure on these child deaths does not take account of deaths due to wars or internal conflicts in certain countries such as Mozambique, Ethiopia, Chad, Somalia.

9. In spite of progress made in the area of health, our children were the least protected since the continent's immunization rates lower than the world's.

10. In addition to this, certain traditional practices which are still very entrenched, contributed to further condemn the children to death or infirmity. The environment itself did not spare these young ones, for it caused complete blindness (onchocerciasis), fatal malaria, dracontiasis (due to the guinea worm) leading to paralysis for life...etc.

11. In 1987, 1988 and 1989 colloquiums that brought together African and non-African political personalities, artists, intellectuals and African religious leaders, were held in Dakar, Senegal, Harare, Zimbabwe and Bamako, Mali. They extensively discussed all aspects of the children's welfare and the impact of economic and social problems on their development; special emphasis was laid on the situation of countries affected by drought, tribal conflicts, and

that of the frontline countries, the preferred target of the apartheid regime.

12. In Bamako, in 1987, African Ministers of Public Health, WHO and UNICEF resolved to launch a new initiative, known as the Bamako initiative, in order to meet mother and child needs in primary health care through community management of essential medicines.

13. The resolution recommending the implementation of the Bamako initiative was adopted by the Council of Ministers and the General Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In another connection, these bodies, fully aware of the need to ensure the health of children, declared 1988 as the African Year for Universal Immunization and 1990 as the African Decade for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children.

14. Here, it should be recalled that these decisions were adopted to strengthen a certain number of actions already undertaken in the area of the economic and social development of the continent which therefore seeks to improve and/or ensure the welfare of the population. Thus, declarations were adopted on the well-being of children; on health basis of development; on culture basis of development ... etc. These instruments were also meant to strengthen the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER).

15. Thus, despite their economic difficulties and restrictions imposed by structural adjustment programmes, most African States improved their children immunization coverage through parents

information and social mobilization, most of the time initiated by the Heads of States themselves.

16. For instance, in Senegal, the immunization rate increased from at least 10 per cent in 1985 to 70 per cent in 1988 and in Egypt, from 50 per cent to more than 80 per cent. Rates of cities such as Addis Ababa, Algiers, Harare, Maputo and Dakar even exceeded 75 per cent and for children under one year, these towns have achieved immunization levels superior or equal to those of New York and Washington.

17. Today, there are new and cheaper methods to save children. Africa which has always been at the forefront of programmes for the survival, protection and development of children, must continue to play this role if it wants to ensure its future. Besides, it has even been proven that it can save its young ones with its meagre resources.

World Summit for Children and the 1980s

18. As previously stated, the interruption of economic development obviously obstructed social progress. In most cases, investments in the areas of health and education have plummeted. Even though children have no voting right and governments pay little attention to their views, it is this continent's duty and interest to ensure their well-being.

19. Unfortunately, the 1980s did not make it possible to continue efforts to ensure the well-being of the continent. In certain

countries, infant and mother mortality rates increased while hunger and malnutrition reached alarming proportions.

20. Worst of all, Mr. James P. Grant, Director General of UNICEF, in his speech before Heads of State and Government during the twenty-fifth Anniversary of the OAU, stated that " the net transfer of resources leaving Africa is now greater than the inflow, with the difference measured in billions of dollars annually". This transfer which totalled US$ 19.1 billion in 1980 today stands at US$ 44.3 billion.

21. The end result is that African States in a bid to pay and service their debts, have had no other choice than to deprive their population of the most vital services such as health, education, and to provide very little to their children, thereby sacrificing their physical and mental development for the wealth of funding bodies.

22. All the external debts of Sub-Saharan Africa hardly amount to 12 per cent of the sums owed by all developing countries; but then its debt burden absorbs one third (if not more) of export earnings. Unfairness also results from the fact that while African countries are increasing the volume of their export products and, in most cases to the detriment of the population and food production, the prices of these products are dropping on world markets, thereby driving and condemning producers to desperation. Furthermore, while Africa remains open to all sorts of imports and even disregards cooperation within the continent, the rich countries are carrying out concerted action and protecting themselves through customs tariffs, and quotas.

23. All these facts have led UNICEF to talk of " a new brand of slavery, known as indebtedness, which has imposed is yoke on the African continent".

24. This is new slavery because the hard and desperate work of parents does not even save the children; new slavery, because hopes expressed on independence have yielded place to bitterness caused by their short duration.

25. Indeed, this is new slavery since the labour of our farmers, miners, women and mothers of our children is contributing instead to further enrich those who deny them the right to a decent life.

26. Certainly, the continent must admit its own shortcomings and errors. It has been the scene of tribal wars, power struggle; it has had military governments, tyrannical policies used by a handful of people who make no distinction between state property and theirs; it has been the venue for ideological experiments and development models alien to the mentality, culture, need, and the technological level of its population. By devoting a greater part of its budget to the acquisition of weapons, it failed in its duty towards those who aspired to peace and prosperity.

27. Children were the first victims of this system which disregarded the people. The child and mother have suffered so much that we now talk of "war against women and children", for they are the most affected by to all the mishaps or disasters besetting the continent.

28. During the 1980s, 1.5 million children in the world died from armed conflicts; 4 million became handicapped in various degrees as a result of bombs, mines, firearms and torture. It was a pity that children were not spared this odious practice: 5 million of them grow up in refugee camps, 12 million have lost their home, and most of them are found in Africa.

29. There is now reason to hope, moreso, after the end of the cold war, the end of the confrontation between the two super powers which dragged Africans into conflicts that did not concern them, and particularly, with the advent of democracy.

30. Indeed, two of the six initiators of the world summit for children were Africans, and the summit itself was heavily attended by African States (46) in a bid to reaffirm their commitment to ensuring the well-being of the child and their firm resolve to improve his plight and/or to strengthen results already obtained.

31. Ghana was the first country in the world to sign and ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Africa was the first continent to adopt an African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which seeks to strengthen the UN Convention and to institute an African Children's Day which, annually, will make it possible to appraise progress made in the effort to improve the situation of children.

32. The continent has registered a certain number of achievements:

(a) The Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force on 25 January 1990 after having been signed and ratified by the majority of African countries;

(b) The African Children's Day was celebrated almost throughout the continent: certain countries even staged parliamentary scenes where children themselves were able to express their needs and conditions;

(c) Africans heavily attended the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All. In this respect, it is necessary to underscore that more attention was accorded to girls because they are more affected by the absence of schools or the priority that families usually give to boys. The goal, here, is to strengthen progress already made in the area of girls' education;

(d) Given the suffering that the children have had to endure during wars or internal conflicts and, in accordance with resolution CM/Res .. ( ), some countries have accepted either to observe a truce or to establish zones or corridors of peace, thereby enabling organizations such as the Red Cross or UNICEF to transport food and medicines to children seriously affected in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia ... ; and

(e) The World Summit for Children, co-chaired by Mali and ...., was carefully prepared, and the continent undertook to achieve the set objectives, particularly, in the area of child mortality and malnutrition.

33. This Summit ended up by adopting a declaration on the survival, protection and development of children as well as the Plan of Action meant to facilitate the implementation of the Declaration during the 1990s.

Challenge

34. The world, for the first time in history, devoted a world summit to children; a summit that debated nothing other than the economic, political, social and cultural aspects affecting the life and health of children; indeed, a summit which has set objectives, norms and the deadline for the implementation of its Declaration.

35. As previously stated, Africa was not, at all, the last to heed to the appeal made by UNICEF and other organizations to ensure the success of the summit. This success was achieved and the world expressed its firm commitment to accomplish the set objectives.

36. Obviously, the situation of Africa has not improved since then. However, facts have shown that there exist cheaper means to treat and cure. Experience has also shown that, with some amount of knowledge, well informed and guided parents could meet immediate needs and even avoid the worst.

37. The examples of poor countries successfully carrying out joint immunization programmes show that political will, combined with social mobilization and community solidarity, could perform miracles.

38. The Director General of UNICEF, in his speech at the OAU General Assembly of Heads of State and Government, stated:

39. " I challenge you, with the support of the international community including UNICEF, not only to prove the demographers wrong when they project that the absolute number of child deaths will increase, but also to achieve the full goals for 1990 and 2000".

40. That is the challenge! With regard to deaths and according to demographers, in the year 2000, Africa which accounts for only 14 per cent of world population will record more than 40 per cent of deaths in the world as against 15 per cent in 1950 and 31 per cent in 1986

41. It would be too sad if such a situation ever occurred; and if it does occur, it would be nothing compared to the shame that each African, worthy of the name, would feel for having enabled the rest of the world to deride this continent, birthplace of humanity that has been abandoned.

International Conference of Donors on Aid for the African Child.

42. After having been informed of a file on children and of the World Summit, the 54th Session of the OAU Council of Ministers meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, adopted a resolution on the implementation of the objectives of the African Decade for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. This resolution recommended, inter alia, the organization of an International Conference of Donors on Aid for the African Child. This Conference will be held in Dakar, Senegal, towards the end of 1992. At the moment, it is being

actively prepared by OAU and UNICEF. After two meetings, both organizations agreed on the following nine (9) points:

(a) The Conference will be part of follow-up activities of the World Summit for Children;

(b) It will be an African initiative, implemented by the OAU in collaboration with UNICEF, in accordance with resolution CM/Res 1360(LIV) adopted in Abuja;

(c) It will seek to establish dialogue between Africa, donors and the international community on the Survival, Protection and Development of the African Child;

(d) It will not be a pledging conference. Rather, it will be an opportunity for the international community to state what it intends to do so as to strengthen the efforts of African States to finance their National Action Programmes (NAPs) for the Child;

(e) It will be exclusively devoted to children and will take into account the serious economic situation of the continent;

(f) It will offer a unique opportunity to provide development-oriented education. Commonwealth, Islamic and French-speaking countries will have to be sensitized; but above all, African countries, themselves, must be mobilized and must express their commitment clearly;

(g) The Conference will require the active participation of all partners including the United Nations system, EEC, ... etc.;

(h) It will be necessary to act, rapidly, in order to obtain the support of donors for the Conference; such support will further strengthen the credibility of the action carried out by Africa, OAU and UNICEF; and

(i) The Conference will enable Africa and the donors to agree on a global amount required to meet the needs of children within the framework of the implementation of the conclusions of the World Summit for Children. Information on this amount will come from NAPs.

43. Thus, the Conference will offer Member States an opportunity to face the challenge. However, it is necessary to note that it constitutes a dual challenge since Africans, besides preparing NAPs, must indicate the share of resources they intend to devote to children, and the international community will merely complete such resources; furthermore, they must do everything to accomplish the objectives of the African Decade for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Declaration of the World Summit.

Conclusions

44. The campaign for the survival, protection and development of children embraces education, health and nutrition, peace and

security, water and housing...; it therefore includes all that relates to the development of each nation.

45. Mobilizing African population in favour of children means mobilizing them to improve their cultural, social, economic and political environment.

46. All this can be done provided there is the political will to involve the various communities in decision-making and the implementation of such decisions.

47. The child represents the future, hope and, indeed, life. We should ensure his well-being and development, and give him love and care. In this way, we would have guaranteed this noble continent, which is ours, a future worthy of its history, hospitality, dignity.